



How State Legislators Can Help Their Communities Get Health Coverage in the Health Insurance Marketplace

From October 2013 through March 2014, hundreds of state legislators across the country helped connect residents in their communities to quality, affordable health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Georgia House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams said the following in a [December 2013 op-ed](#) about the role she played in explaining the Affordable Care Act to her constituents:

"I have worked with our caucus members to host a multitude of ACA townhalls across the state of Georgia where we have explained what the Exchanges will do and why Medicaid Expansion is an imperative that we are sadly forsaking. If you've ever attended a state legislator's convening event, you'll know that seats are always available. Yet we have been pleased by the robust turnout and the level of engagement. The citizens who leave work a few minutes early to join our discussions come ... because they understand what Healthcare.gov really is -- a proxy for a safety net sorely lacking for too long."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rep-stacey-abrams/getting-it-right_2_b_4155759.html

The next open enrollment period for health insurance will run from **November 15, 2014 through February 15, 2015**. There are several ways that local officials can ensure that residents in their community get the information and assistance to enroll. The most effective practices for state legislators include:

- ✓ Make your office an information center for enrollment information – referring residents to appropriate local help locations
- ✓ Leverage local resources, like city/county facilities, to provide enrollment opportunities
- ✓ Partner with community organizations on a local enrollment coalition
- ✓ Generate media coverage, via press conferences, local access TV/radio, or PSAs to raise awareness and promote enrollment sites
- ✓ Host community enrollment events

And even prior to open enrollment, many of these activities will also be effective to reach out to people who qualify for a special enrollment period or those who qualify for CHIP or Medicaid which have year round enrollments. It is important to remember that even though low-income individuals can enroll in Medicaid anytime during the year, the open enrollment period is a good opportunity to reach out to individuals who might be eligible but unenrolled.

This packet includes information and best practices from local officials during the first enrollment period to help you accomplish these goals. We encourage you to share your ideas and questions through the ten [HHS Regional Offices](#). Contact information for the Regional Offices can also be found at the end of this packet.



How State Legislators Can Use Existing Local Resources to Help Enroll Residents in Health Coverage

There are a number of ways that local officials can use existing city and county resources to help enroll residents in quality, affordable health coverage. Below are some of the methods and specific examples of activities that elected officials utilized during the first open enrollment period in 2013-14.

- ☐ **Utilize public spaces for enrollment activities:** Set regular office hours for enrollment at recreation centers, libraries, workforce development sites and other city/county offices. Work with your HHS Regional Office to identify trained assisters who can staff these sites, or train legislative staff to assist consumers.
 - Florida State Representative Daphne Campbell enrolled constituents at her office from 9 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday in the month leading up to March 31st.
 - Pennsylvania State Representative Dan Frankel hosted numerous information sessions at a local library in Pittsburgh.
- ☐ **Use robocalls** to refer consumers to enrollment assistance locations and/or healthcare.gov.
 - A number of Texas legislators to provide information to their constituents about enrollment via automated phone calls. Constituents were asked if they had health insurance, and if they answered no, they were directed to the call center or given information about where they could enroll locally.
- ☐ **Host a press conference to kick off open enrollment and before large enrollment events** to let residents know about upcoming enrollment opportunities and generate local earned media. In addition, include information on the Marketplace in remarks at other events to continue to push the message.
 - Texas State Representative Eddie Rodriguez visited a 211 call center to highlight one of the many local efforts underway to inform consumers about their options in the Health Insurance Marketplace in the days leading up to the end of enrollment.
- ☐ **Include informational inserts in regular mailings to residents**
 - New Jersey State Senator Nia Gill worked with county and municipal officials to include ACA information in local water bill mailings.
- ☐ **Record a PSA encouraging residents to enroll** in the marketplace and work with local television and radio stations to air the announcements.
 - Florida State Senator Geraldine Thompson recorded a video PSA and disseminated it through her distribution list.
- ☐ **Work with the local school district and PTA** to include information for parents through school newsletters, back-to-school events, open houses and take home pamphlets.

- ☐ **Use email and telephone networks** to reach consumers with enrollment information including regular newsletters.
 - PA State Senator Vincent Hughes sent several emails to his constituents to educate them on the ACA and provide information on upcoming enrollment events.
- ☐ **Apply to become a Certified Application Counselor (CAC) designated organization** and have staff trained to become CACs to provide assistance in your legislative office. You can apply to be a CAC organization at <http://marketplace.cms.gov/help-us/cac.html>
 - In Pennsylvania, the Democratic caucus received a staff training to learn how to enroll constituents.
- ☐ **Serve as “door openers” or conveners** for city, county, or regional roundtables targeting special populations, chambers of commerce, school boards, and hard-to-reach populations.
 - In Texas, State Representative Garnet Coleman and State Senator Rodney Ellis organized a "sign up Sunday" event in which navigators were at local churches to help sign people up.
 - Nebraska State Senator Jeremy Nordquist organized a college tour and visited every college in the state to ensure that young people understood their health coverage options.
- ☐ **Be creative and do what works for your community.** You know your constituents best, and we encourage you to find innovative ways to help people enroll.
 - Florida State Representative Kionne McGhee created a program called “Souls to Enroll” and worked with churches in the Miami area to ensure that there was ACA information following Sunday services. The program spread and a number of state legislators became involved.
 - In Texas, State Senator Kirk Watson hosted a “meme contest” to encourage young people to learn more about the ACA.



How State Legislators Can Work with a Community Coalition to Enroll Residents in Health Coverage

During the 2014 Open Enrollment period, one of the most important roles that local officials played was to convene and support local coalitions of business leaders, non-profit organizations, and health care providers to coordinate on outreach and enrollment strategies. It is critical to maintain and strengthen these coalitions and continue the outreach work in the community as we move into the next Open Enrollment.

Keys to a successful enrollment coalition:

- **Local leadership** – As a leader within your community, your participation can help elevate the work of the coalition. Designate a staff member to be the primary point of contact for the coalition, and utilize your communications staff and infrastructure to support press efforts.
- **Broad representation** – The most effective coalitions have representatives from all the relevant partners; a suggested list of organizations is below. Think beyond the typical healthcare stakeholders!
- **Communication** – Many coalitions benefited from regular communications leading up to and during enrollment. Weekly meetings or calls and portals for group collaboration (shared calendars, access to shared data, regular reports) helped regions divide responsibilities and reduce duplicative efforts.

Some organizations and partners that you may want to consider including:

- Hospitals
- Chamber of Commerce
- Insurance brokers
- Grassroots organizations like Enroll America, Organizing for Action, Planned Parenthood
- Labor unions
- Faith leaders and interfaith coalitions
- Community health centers
- Healthcare providers or organizations, such as doctors, nurses, or social workers
- Colleges and universities including community colleges and technical colleges
- Fraternities and sororities
- Representation from key populations specific to the local community
- Public school district representatives
- Libraries
- [HHS Regional Office](#)



How State Legislators Can Use Enrollment Events to Help Enroll Residents in Health Coverage

While many individuals will enroll online at healthcare.gov or through the call center at 1-800-318-2596, many residents will want in-person assistance to help explain their coverage options and walk through the enrollment process. One way to help connect residents to this assistance is by hosting enrollment events. Below are some tips on how to host a successful enrollment event.

Creating an enrollment event

- Decide what type of enrollment activity you will host. You can host information-only sessions, town halls where residents can ask questions of experts, open houses where residents can walk in to meet with an assister, or an event where residents register for an appointment in advance.
- It can be helpful to integrate Marketplace information and enrollment into appropriate existing community events, to take advantage of a built-in audience and shared logistical support.
- Planning enrollment events can take time – most have found that planning four weeks in advance of the event provides adequate time to coordinate logistics, volunteers and promotion.

Location and timing

- The ideal location is one that is easy to access, has ample parking, and is recognizable to the community. Libraries, recreation centers, sports complexes and city or county hall can be ideal locations to host events. Many hospitals also have space available for use.
- Ensure that there are adequate safeguards (physical and electronic) in place to protect consumers' information, and that there is strong internet connection at the site. Have a backup internet connection plan such as air cards.
- Events that reach the most residents are held either in the evening or on weekends.
- The best venues have multiple spaces to meet the different needs of consumers, such as a room for a video or PowerPoint presentation on the marketplace while consumers wait, computer banks for group account creation, and a one-on-one room for enrollment appointments.

Materials & Assisters

- It is helpful to provide attendees with an enrollment checklist ([available online](#)) in advance of the event so they can come prepared with the necessary information and documentation.
- You will need computers with Internet access for residents to enroll and a way for consumers to print the pertinent information from their enrollment when completed.
- Identify local assisters at <https://localhelp.healthcare.gov/> or work with your [HHS regional office](#) to confirm CAC and Navigator support for your event

Promoting the event

- Partner with local media outlets such as local television or radio stations to help spread the word and increase attendance. Use your social media channels to promote the event.
- Identify event spokespeople who speak the language of the intended audience for your enrollment event.
- Enlist known local leaders or celebrities to attend or promote the event.
- Encourage attendees to create an email address and an online account at HealthCare.Gov before the event to reduce waiting time on site.



HHS Regional Directors Contact Information

<http://www.hhs.gov/iea/regional/index.html>

Region 1 – Boston

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